CLAIBORNE AVENUE IN THE TREME: RE CLAIMING NEUTRAL GROUND

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis investigates and proposes a redesign for Claiborne Avenue, a "neutral ground" in the Treme neighborhood of New Orleans. The Treme has suffered greatly due to several planning interventions, most importantly the building in 1969 of the elevated I-10 freeway, which runs right over the middle of the district. At one time Claiborne Avenue was the heart of the Treme, lined by a large grove of old oak trees. The I-10 brought blight to the area. Nevertheless, neighborhood residents have kept their culture alive underneath the freeway bridge. It continues to be a ritualized space, in spite of the oppressive nature of the massive concrete structure that looms overhead. The intent of this thesis is to develop another option for the future of this neutral ground, one in which the I-10 overpass is removed. In a neighborhood with such strong and persistent connections to its past, it is important not only to re-establish Claiborne Avenue as an aesthetic amenity, but also to create a discourse around the injustices that have occurred. The hope is that, by approaching the project in this manner, the neighborhood's residents can begin to heal and create a better future for the Treme.

To David Hays and Dianne Harris, without their guidance this thesis could not have been finished. To Richard for his constant support.

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I. Glossary of Terms

Congo Square- the only place in the antebellum South where slaves and free people of color had their own market and were allowed to publicly worship on Sundays. It is just northwest of the Vieux Carre. It is known specifically as the birthplace of jazz.

Creole- "the mélange of people from south Louisiana, especially New Orleans, who are of mixed French, Spanish, and African ancestry."[1] In New Orleans people who were considered Creole received greater levels of privilege.

Faubourg- an early suburb of the Vieux Carre such as Faubourg Treme and Faubourg Marigny.

Jazz Funerals- "funerals with musical accompaniment unique to New Orleans. Processions weave their way down the street from the funeral home to the cemetery." It is considered an appropriate send off for jazz musicians and those who belong to Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs.

These rituals include loved ones of the deceased. Jazz bands march and play dirges en route to the cemetery, and upbeat music returning home. This is done to celebrate the sweet and the sour in the deceased's life.[3]

Krewe- A group of individuals who work on a Mardi Gras parade, such as the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club--the Krewe for the Zulu parade.

[1] Jerry McKernan, Kevin V. Mulcahy, "Hurricane Katrina: A Cultural Chernobyl" Journal of Arts, Management, Law, and Society 38 no. 3 (Fall 2008): 219.
[2] McKernan, Mulcahy, 223.
[3] McKernan, Mulcahy, 222.

Mardi Gras Indians- African-Americans from New Orleans who pay homage to their Native-American heritage by creating costumes based on Native-Americans from the region and bead work from West Africa. There are 38 tribes based along family lines. They have rituals that are enacted several times a year as well as at Mardi Gras.[4]

Neutral ground- the median strip of a boulevard in New Orleans originally given that name because it was the place where the French and the Spanish conducted business when the city was in transition of ownership from one to the other. These median strips can be very substantial in width as well as length.

Second Line Parades- African-American parades in New Orleans that follow an original group of musicians. Those watching are encouraged to join the ritual by performing dances, specifically the 'Bambula,' and singing along; these derive from jazz funerals.[5]

Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs- fraternal organizations that began as a form of insurance in African-American communities in New Orleans. They would guarantee an appropriate send off for their deceased members. These clubs originated jazz funerals and participate in Mardi gras.

Vieux Carre- meaning Old Square, the French name given to the French Quarter.[6]

4 McKernan, Mulcahy, 222.
5 McKernan, Mulcahy, 223.
6 Keith Weldon Medley, "Black New Orleans: A Tour of the Big Easy Through the Eyes of a Native Reveals a Little Known History that Runs Through the Heart of It," American Legacy, Summer 2000, 18.

II. Introduction

The neutral ground that runs through the Treme neighborhood in New Orleans is Claiborne Avenue. This neutral ground has been sacrificed in the name of progress. It was not only the main street for the Treme; it was the neighborhood route for the Zulu parade. This boulevard was also a ritualized space for the Mardi Gras Indians. Due to the creation of the I-10 freeway and other developments, North Claiborne Avenue has become a cultural palimpsest. Yet this neighborhood has continued its rituals underneath the viaduct despite the changes in the built environment. So, how does one reveal and expose a cultural palimpsest so that this community can heal?

It is important to clarify a few things about the Treme. Claiborne Avenue was not always a blighted thoroughfare. This was a rich and lively center of the Treme, the oldest African American neighborhood in the United States.[7] The Treme has always been an economically diverse community with historic housing stock. It was never completely African-American until "progress" intervened. It was one of two faubourgs or suburbs adjacent to the French Quarter, the core area from which the city grew. Culturally it is significant because it is credited with the invention of jazz, and has been a neighborhood where many musicians have played and where they continue to do so. Early jazz musicians such as "Jelly Roll" Morton, Louis Armstrong, and Sydney Bechet, who not only played, but was also born there, have all graced the Treme with their presence.

The neutral ground that existed on North Claiborne at one time functioned as

[7] Kenneth J. Lacho, and Kenneth Fox; "An Analysis of an Inner-City Neighborhood: Treme-Past, Present, and Future," Small Business Advancement National Center. http://www.sbaer.uca.edu/research/asbe/2001/18.pdf (accessed) November 24, 2009.

a lively community space. At 196 feet wide, and five blocks long it was, in reality, a series of parks framed by a large grove of old oak trees that faded out to the horizon. As one older resident of the Treme remembers, "We used to have big oak trees and azalea gardens out there…Carnival day (Mardi Gras), everybody would be out barbecuing all along Claiborne Street from Canal Street down to St. Bernard."[8] He was speaking about when the Zulu Parade came through for Mardi Gras. He was speaking about when the Zulu Parade came through for Mardi Gras. And amazingly this tradition still continues. Underneath the freeway during carnival time, the neighborhood grills out and has concerts that fill in the rest of the day. The Zulu Parade starts at 8:00 am, so it is an eventful day. Unlike other communities that have been blighted by freeways, the residents of the Treme have not forgotten their common ground. The complaints that one hears are not 'they took away our street;' the cry is 'they took away our neutral ground!' Clearly the loss resonates much more deeply than the loss of a street; feelings about Claiborne Avenue are colored by a persistent sense of shared ownership.

[8] Lolis E. Elie, Planners Push to Tear Out Elevated I-10, Times Biscayne, July 11, 2009.

III. Literature Review

The literature for this project derives from several diverse fields due to the complexity of the project. Pierce F. Lewis's book, New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape, is known to be the quintessential history, offering an extensive account of the history and development of the city of New Orleans. Lewis' book provided invaluable insights into why the city has evolved such distinct traditions and rituals, and how New Orleanians maintain their culture. Because of the cultural character of this project, the article entitled "Hurricane Katrina: A Cultural Chernobyl" was a valuable resource describing the folk culture (African-American culture) of New Orleans; also valuable was the article, "Black New Orleans," by Keith Weldon Medley. Those texts depict not only the distinct characteristics of Creole culture but also the impact those had on the development of jazz as a truly American art form.[9] In addition to written literature, two documentary films have been influential in understanding the human element and neighborhood of the Treme: Faubourg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans and All on Mardi Gras Day added an ethnographic depth to my understanding of the cultural heritage and rituals of the Treme, as well as valuable interviews with individuals who continue this living culture. Ken Burns's Jazz was another documentary that was essential to the understanding of the beginnings of jazz culture.

The website of The Congress for New Urbanism, as well as an interview I conducted with its CEO, John Norquist, was important in comprehending both the development of the I-10 freeway and its impact on the neighborhood of the Treme. The website includes precedents for the removal of freeways in American cities; not only does eliminating freeways or parts of them prove to be a growing trend, but it

[9] McKernan, Mulcahy, p. 219.

also serves to illustrate that it can actually ease the congestion of traffic. This will be discussed in the section below about the I-10 freeway.

"An Analysis of an Inner-City Neighborhood: Treme-Past, Present and Future," a paper developed by Prof. Kenneth J Lacho and Kenneth Fox from the University of New Orleans, clearly expresses not only the wishes of the residents from Treme but also reviews the damage done to the neighborhood by the development of the I-10 freeway. This paper acknowledges the dilemmas that the neighborhood faces as well as the opportunities for future planning which will be discussed in section VII, below.

The Times Biscayne newspaper contained insights into contemporary issues over the I-10 controversy, as well as aspects of New Orleans Mardi Gras Culture. In particular the writing of both Lolis E. Elie and Keith I. Marszalek were helpful in this understanding.

IV. Site Analysis

The original intent of this thesis was to study the interactions between ritual and the built environment. What began as an analysis of Mardi Gras and the Zulu Parade's influence upon the city turned into the discovery of several aspects of the Treme neighborhood that would not otherwise have been revealed. Early in the thesis process, I developed a series of maps looking at different aspects of the Mardi Gras parade. The first two considered the larger ritual. The third investigated the routes of the Zulu parade over its history. The fourth and last investigated the different neutral grounds throughout the city.

The first diagram (figure 1.) illustrates the history of the development of Mardi Gras. The upper portion of the diagram shows the evolution of the parade, whereas the lower half represents the periods of time over which each of the parade organizations or krewes has existed. For those who have never been to a Mardi Gras celebration in New Orleans, the analysis helps to clarify the magnitude of this event.

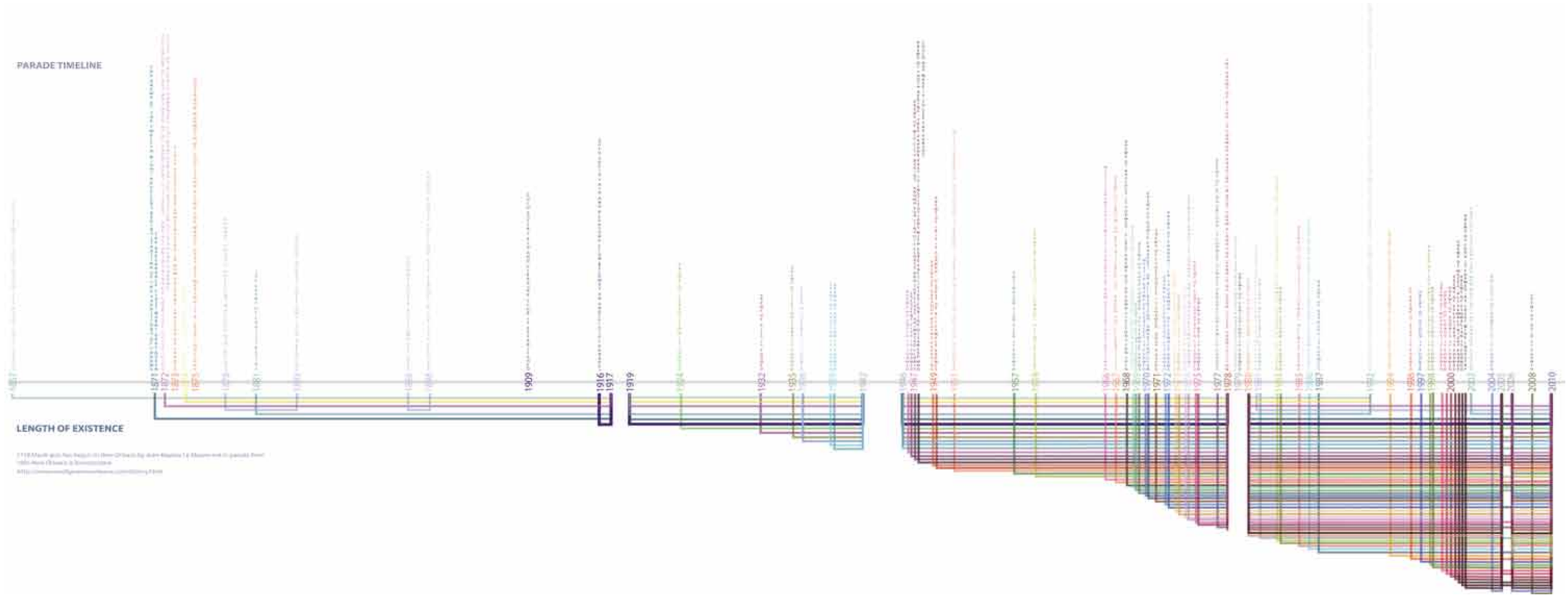

Figure 1. Parade Timeline.

The second mapping exercise (figure 2.) demonstrates the plethora of parade routes during the Mardi Gras Season. For the most part they maintain the same path; however several of them deviate from it at one point or another. The Zulu parade is one of the parades that deviates from the main route. This parade became the main focus because of its unique history and development which will be discussed in the next paragraph.

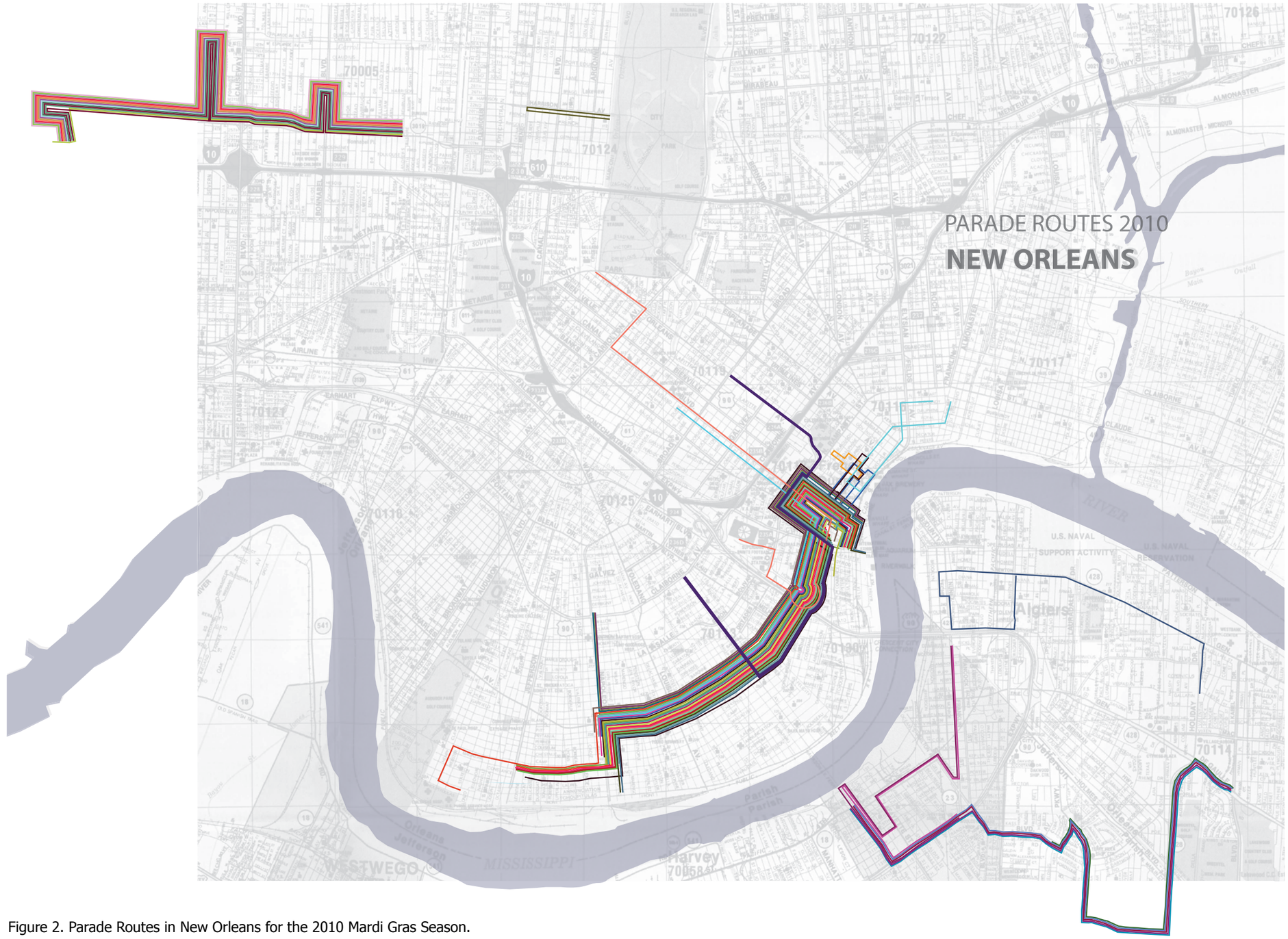

Figure 2. Parade Routes in New Orleans for the 2010 Mardi Gras Season.

The third mapping shows the Zulu parade's development over time. It is important to note that, because this krewe was African American, it was not an officially recognized parade until 1969, therefore it did not follow the parade routes established by other krewes, such as Comus or Rex. Zulu began parading along routes determined by business

Figure 3. Zulu Parade History.

owners who were willing to pay for the krewe to stop by and draw customers to their businesses. This illustrates how closely linked the Mardi gras parade has always been to the local economy. It also explains why the Zulu route deviated year after year. In the 2009 as well as the 2010 map, one can see that Zulu eventually assimilated to the official parade route.

At the Zulu parade's finale, the participants pay homage to Zulu's history and return towards North Claiborne Avenue. They are no longer able to parade down the neutral ground but now are relegated to pass through it perpendicularly. This is the intersection between the parade and the residents of the Treme, underneath the I-10 freeway.

Through these mapping exercises, issues concerning the I-10 freeway and North Claiborne Avenue became apparent. The studies revealed several issues specific to the Treme as a district of New Orleans. The first was the concept of neutral grounds and their relationship to residents of the neighborhood. The second was the importance of North Claiborne Avenue to the community of the Treme. Tied into the last statement was the understanding that the parade route was not only re-routed, but that people were congregating under the I-10 freeway during Mardi Gras because it was their neutral ground. And the original intent in building Louis Armstrong Park, and the Treme's relationship to it, was revealed, and will be discussed later.

The last study (figure 4.) exposes the different neutral grounds throughout New Orleans. North Claiborne Avenue is highlighted in purple. It becomes evident that the city grid was reinforced by these neutral grounds. Unlike many neighborhoods in New Orleans that are defined by these boulevards meaning that the boulevards separate

one neighborhood from another, North Claiborne Avenue runs through the heart of the Treme--or, more accurately, before the I-10 freeway.[10]

"...'the Neutral Ground' a geographical recognition of the armed truce between Creoles and Americans...means the median strip of any boulevard." *New Orleans The Making of an Urban Landscape* by Pierce Lewis

Figure 4. Neutral Grounds.

[10] Lolis E. Elie, Planners Push to Tear Out Elevated I-10, Times Biscayne, July 11, 2009.

V. Treme Past and Present

The Treme is the oldest African-American neighborhood in the United States[11] (See figure 5.). Treme divided up his land for sale; it was marketed toward Creoles and free people of color. However, the area that came to be known as Faubourg Treme contained a population that was about eighty percent of African descent, (a fact that becomes important later.) Its location is just above the French Quarter separated by Ramparts. It is at this locale where the present day Armstrong Park and, more importantly, Congo Square resides.

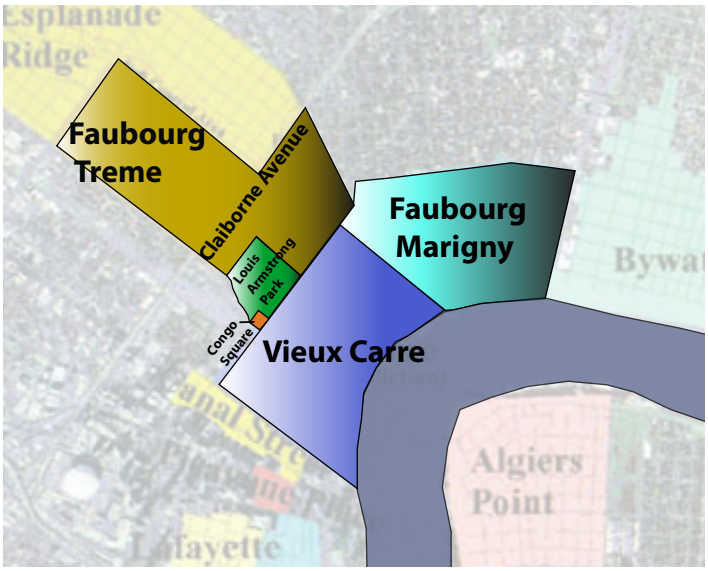

Figure 5. Treme Neighborhood Map.

Even though most inhabitants of the neighborhood were of African descent, there was great cultural diversity in their backgrounds, which included Creoles, Haitians, Native Americans, and those from other Caribbean Islands. That diversity helped shape the neighborhood's cultural distinction, which can only be described as a gestalt. It also helped in shaping their religious backgrounds. In New Orleans during the antebellum period, slaves were allowed to practice their religion on Sundays. This was due to the Catholic background of both the French and the Spanish. Congo Square evolved into a spiritual center for slaves and gens du coleur[12] or free people of color to worship, to have their own market, and play their own music.[13] (Jazz) "…arose in New Orleans as

[11] McKernan, Mulcahy, 219.
[12] McKernan, Mulcahy, 219.
[13] McKernan, Mulcahy, 219.

a blend of African rhythmic and ensemble patterns, European instruments and blues and sacred song, overlain with an African-American genius for improvisation."[14] It is due to this unique set of circumstances that New Orleans became an incubator for the development of jazz.

Many great jazz legends have lived in the Treme, among them Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet (who was also born there), and "Jelly Roll" Morton. In its heyday at the beginning of the 20th century, Storyville, the red-light district in the Treme, was the place where jazz legends got their start and honed their craft. Jelly Roll Morton and others played in bordellos and juke joints.[15] Storyville and Congo Square became the places where jazz evolved and thrived. Both locales also aided in jazz becoming more than just music; it evolved into a huge part of the lives of the people of the Treme. To explain the relationship between jazz and New Orleanians more succinctly, "…jazz is more than a musical aesthetic. It has a broader cultural context as the unique expression of the black community as shaped by the Creole milieu of New Orleans." Storyville was eventually taken over by the US Navy in 1917 due to fears of the corruption of sailors departing for Europe in WWI.[16] However, jazz's place in New Orleans culture, especially the Treme, had already become fixed. No matter what has happened to the neighborhood, this living culture endures.

a. Mardi Gras Indians

There are local traditions in this neighborhood that are unfamiliar to non-natives. "The Mardi Gras Indian Tradition has been a vital part of black carnival for more than 100 years. It is both homage to Native-Americans and a celebration of

[14] McKernan, Mulcahy, 219.
[15] Ken Burns, Jazz, VHS, Episode One GUMBO.
[16] Medley, 22.

African Culture."[17] The Mardi Gras Indians, which stem from the Native American ties to African-Americans in New Orleans, are one such local tradition. When African slaves first arrived in New Orleans many Native-Americans were already enslaved there. The cultures of the existing Native-Americans and the arriving slaves from Africa were so similar that they seamlessly merged and many belonging to them married.[18] Native-American tribes outside of New Orleans often took in runaway slaves as well.[19]

Mardi Gras Indians run along family lines and pass from generation to generation.[20] "On Mardi Gras day, the Black Indians sing and dance to traditional chants and have 'confrontations' with members of rival tribes. It should be emphasized, however, that such confrontations take the form of highly ritualized dances that are, in effect, competitive events to reclaim public space through stylized performance."[21] There are 38 tribes linked to their respective neighborhoods. Mardi Gras and the Feast of St. Joseph are their two largest days for parading. They are most known for the beauty of their feathered costumes, which are Native-American in design with African tribal bead work. The presence of Mardi Gras Indians underneath the I-10 on Claiborne is a mixture of celebration and sorrow. "What has made New Orleans different is that this group has responded with counternarratives, countermusic, and counterart forms. The Mardi Gras Indians represent an interesting example of how an underclass has redressed the effects of economic and social discrimination by valorizing its cultural heritage."[22] This was always their ritualized space and it will not be taken away by anyone.

[17] Royce Osborn, All on a Mardi Gras Day, DVD, Spyboy Pictures, Royce Osborn, (Spyboy Pictures New Orleans LA 2008).[18] Dawn Logsdon, Faubourg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans, VHS, ed. Stanley Nelson, and Wynton Marsalis, Rev. D.L. Groat Carson quote (New Orleans: Serendipity Films).
[19] Logsdon, Rev. D.L. Groat Carson quote.
[20] Osborn.
[21] McKernan, Mulcahy, 222.
[22] McKernan, Mulcahy, 222.

b. Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club

In 1857, the ritual of Mardi Gras was in danger of ending, for it was becoming quite a violent event. At that time it was not the organized chaos that it is today. There were no officially orchestrated parades. It was not until the krewe of Comus decided to create its organized parade form in 1857 that the ritual was saved. At its inception Carnivale (the original name for Mardi Gras) was a white socialite affair with cotillions that continue to this day. More white krewes joined and continued to follow the same format until a group of African-Americans got together and, in response to the white festival, decided to participate in an entirely different way.

In 1909, an African-American organization formed known as the Zulu Aid and Pleasure Club. Its beginnings were one of the first forms of insurance in the African-American community. People paid monthly dues and were given financial help if a member fell on hard times. By 1916, Zulu established a Mardi Gras parade; instead of creating their own socialite affair like the white parades, they begat an event full of mockery and spectacle. The king of Zulu (mocking Rex- the king of carnival) wore "…a sack (for clothing) and a crown fashioned from a lard can. A banana stalk was his scepter."[23] The krewe of Zulu consisted of working class to middle class African Americans as opposed to those of Creole descent. Because Zulu was an unofficial parade until 1969, the krewe developed its own distinct rituals and maintained continually fluctuating parade routes, as can be seen in the third mapping exercise, above.

Zulu is now one of the most beloved parades during the Mardi Gras season. It continues its place as one of the Super Krewes of Mardi Gras, meaning that it is one of the six most substantial parades, and also carries the prize catch of all the Mardi Gras throws, the Zulu coconut: a beautifully hand crafted, sanded, gilded, and glittered

[23] Keith I. Marszalek, "A History of Carnival," The Times-Picayune, January 13, 2009.

coconut handed to a few lucky recipients during the parade. Its recipient is granted the best of luck for the New Year.

c. Congo Square and Louis Armstrong Park

Figure 6. Authors own photo of Congo Square.

Congo Square is understood as the place where jazz was born. It is at the edge of the Vieux Carre in the neighborhood of the Treme. Today it is located in the southeastern corner of Louis Armstrong Park. Historically it is the place where slaves and free people of color were allowed to worship, celebrate, and play music on Sundays. Because the city was part of both French and Spanish acquisitions, and both of those countries were Catholic, slaves were allowed not only to have Sundays off but to worship too. Being Catholic, they felt that it was immoral to not permit slaves to practice their religion. This was the only place in the occurred. According to Ken Burns's Jazz, after Jim Crow laws came into effect, those of Creole backgrounds lost their social status. Many were educated, classically trained musicians who played in New Orleans's various operas and symphonies. However, when Jim Crow laws came into effect, if they wanted to play music they had to associate with other people of color. According to Wynton Marsalis, "Creole orchestras which existed at one point suddenly disappeared, and these clarinetists had no work.So they were essentially forced to go into the black community. And that level of technical fluency forever changed the nature of the music…Creole

musicians merged their classical virtuosity with the blues inflected music of black bands…Together they would transform every kind of music played in New Orleans."[24] All of this is believed to have taken place in Congo Square. Today it is where Jazzfest takes place annually in New Orleans.

Even though Louis Armstrong Park currently houses Congo Square, the park is not as well received. The residents of the Treme are locked out by the gates facing the neighborhood, whereas the entrance facing the French Quarter is open. This just fuels the belief that the park was created to assuage the anger over tearing down twelve square blocks in the Treme for the Community Center. Supposedly, the park was created as reparation for the removal of the oak groves on North Claiborne Avenue. Yet, as late as 2009, residents were still excluded from the planning process to make repairs on the park, continuing the history of discontent.[25] Not only was their neutral ground removed, but promises about the park have not been carried out.

d. The Relationship to the Street

In looking at the historical housing stock in the Treme, one begins to understand its resident's relationship to the street. The Creole Cottages and Shotgun Houses are tightly packed in and built right up to the sidewalk. This encourages street socialization for fundamentally practical reasons: where else would people socialize if they have no front yards? Even in the French Quarter on weekends, as I have experienced, some blocks are closed off to traffic, and musicians and tourists walk in the street. That being said, it is hardly surprising that many public rituals, such as jazz funerals and second line parades, utilize the road as a stage. Perhaps it is best said by jazz patriarch Ellis Marsalis, "In New Orleans, culture doesn't come

[24] Ken Burns, Jazz, Episode 1 Gumbo, VHS, Wynton Marsalis (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2000).
[25] Lolis E.Elie, "Armstrong Park Planning Exclusionary, Treme Residents Complain." Times Biscayne, August 18, 2009.
[26] Jerry McKernan, Kevin V. Mulcahy, 220.

down from on high: it bubbles up from the street."[26] Of course he is not only speaking of where it is performed, but also of what part of society invents this unique culture.

e. The Neighborhood's Decline

Unfortunately the Treme's contributions to the culture of New Orleans did not stop the degradation of the neighborhood under the guise of progress. There are four events that are acknowledged as the contributing factors to the downfall of the neighborhood. They are as follows:

- The removal of the 4th largest market in the city of New Orleans, replaced with the Municipal Auditorium in the 1930s.[27]
- The Lafitte Housing Project was built in 1941 with 896 units for African American tenants. It is currently being torn down and replaced with other housing types.[28]
- Twelve blocks of the Treme were torn down to be replaced with the Cultural Center in the 1960s. This area is now occupied by Louis Armstrong¬¬ Park which is soon to be the New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park.[29]
- The elevated I-10 Freeway was completed in 1969. This freeway completely covered the neutral ground of North Claiborne Ave., essentially taking away what is viewed by residents as claimed public space.[30]

All of the above events have forced much of the culture of the Treme underground, so to speak—or, more accurately, under the viaduct. Even after forty years, the community of the Treme has neither forgotten nor forgiven the fact that their neutral ground has been take away. The Mardi Gras Indians as well as the Zulu Social Aid and

[27] Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, Treme/ Lafitte Neighborhood Snapshot, http://.gnocdc.org/Orleans/4/42/snapshot.html (accessed December 19, 2009).
[28] Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, http://.gnocdc.org/Orleans/4/42/snapshot.html.
[29] Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, http://.gnocdc.org/Orleans/4/42/snapshot.html.
[30] Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, http://.gnocdc.org/Orleans/4/42/snapshot.html.

Pleasure Club use this space for rituals, as do the community members who watch the Zulu Parade. The area underneath the I-10 has become an active community space for this living culture. Regardless of the presence of the freeway, it is time to re-expose the rich culture of the Treme and return their neutral ground to the community. If this is a cultural palimpsest, it needs to be unearthed for the disenfranchisement of this community to heal and allow their traditions to resurface.

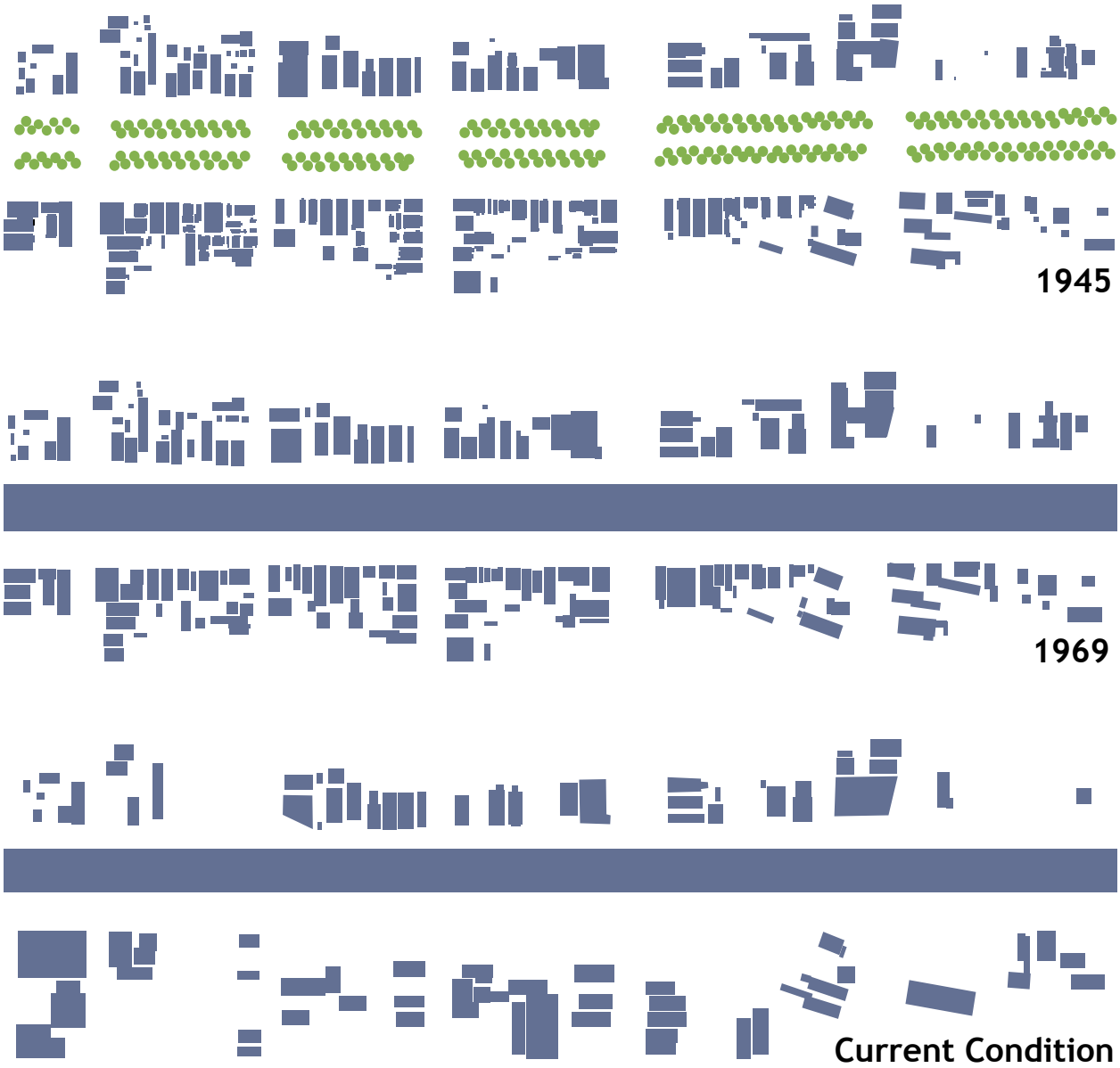

Figure 7. Figure Ground Study of Claiborne Avenue and Its Changes over Time.

VI. The I-10 Freeway

Several parties are now involved with a project to remove the I-10 freeway from the Treme. The Treme Neighborhood Association is one of them. Catholic Charities is also involved most likely due to the fact that St. Augustine's Church, the oldest African-American Catholic Church in the United States, is located in the Treme. Smart Growth of Louisiana is working on the project as well. The man in charge of Smart Growth, Bill Borah, was the original attorney who fought to keep the I-10 from going through the French Quarter. This is important to mention because it was the first time that anyone fought the highway department and won. The last involved party is the Congress for New Urbanism, which has currently secured funds to conduct a feasibility study on the project.

I had the opportunity to interview John Norquist from The Congress for New Urbanism, and he illuminated some important facts about the I-10 freeway. First, he explained that this freeway was not planned to go into New Orleans. The cross-regional route, linking California and Florida, could more easily have by-passed New Orleans (see figure 8.). However, the mayor at the time wanted the freeway to come into the city, and he pressured the highway department to do so. Since Hurricane Katrina, as can be seen in the graph below, the number of users of the I-10 has declined by about half. There is no reason to expect that this number will climb again. Mr. Norquist also pointed out that, even though it seems counterintuitive, traffic often decreases with the removal of a freeway. He cited the Embarcadero in San Francisco as a case in point. After the removal of that freeway, traffic actually improved, the reason being that users have options once they are back in the city grid. These choices free up the continuous funneling of traffic, lessening its impact.

The current proposal for freeway renewal is to take down two miles of the I-10 and blend it into traffic (see figure 9.). Mr. Norquist said that, in every case they

have encountered, the removal of a freeway ushers investment back into the area. The elimination of blight brings life back to the neighborhood. This two mile removal would re-establish acres of open space and return it to the urban fabric, breathing new life back into the Treme.

Figure 8. Original Plan for I-10 Freeway.

TRAFFIC COUNTS ON EXISTING I- 10

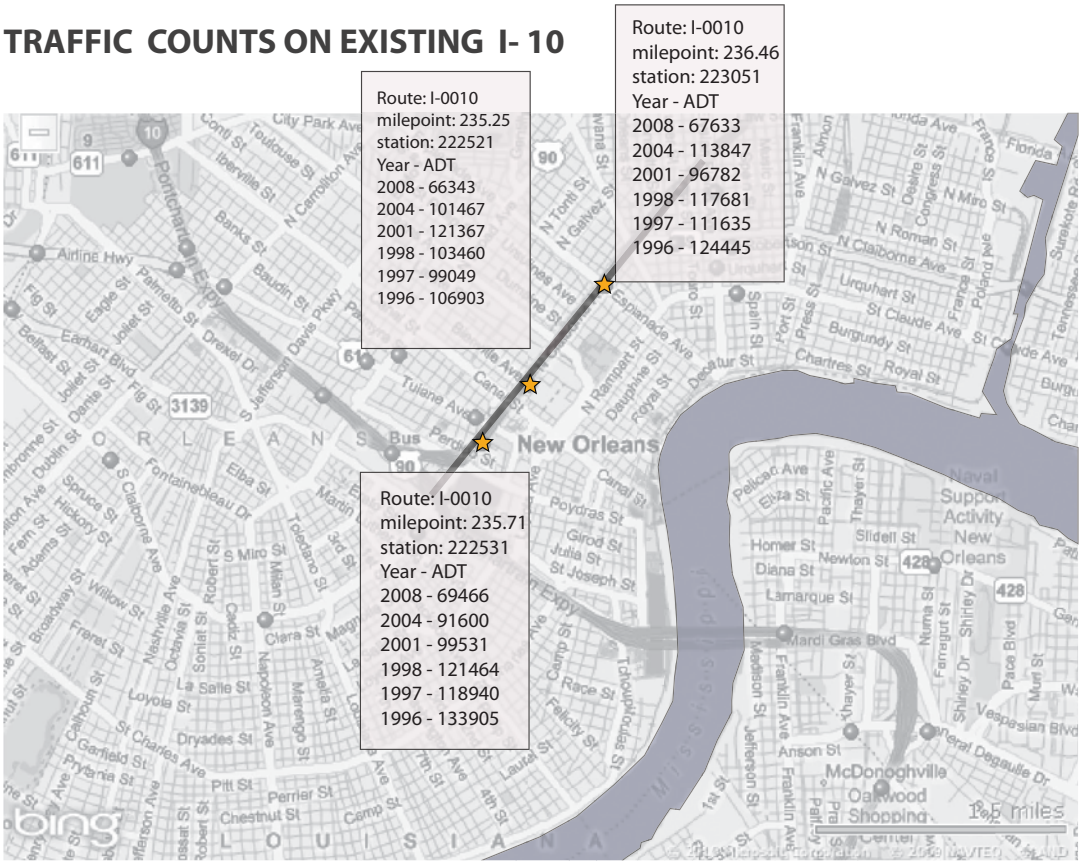

Figure 9. Traffic Counts on Existing I-10.

VII. Conceptual Design- The Re-exposure of Claiborne Ave.

Hopefully, once the I-10 is demolished and this open space is returned to the community, the neutral ground will once again function as a series of mini parks or plazas (see figure 11.). The prideful return of Claiborne Avenue to the Treme would aid in the stabilization this neighborhood needs, both physically and economically.

To return the neutral ground to what it once was is not a sufficient gesture for this community. All too often the approach in dealing with disenfranchised communities is to beautify the space instead of acknowledging its past, but this is now part of the history of place. In "daylighting" elements previously obscured or ignored in this cultural palimpsest, the hope is that this design will bridge some of the indignities suffered by the Treme in a very direct way. Through this acknowledgement, communities can move forward. So, by retaining some elements of the overpass--specifically, the columns, which support the art project, Reclamation of the Oak Trees--this community might begin to acknowledge their past and move forward. (The columns are painted by local artists depicting people who have contributed to the culture of the Treme and those businesses formerly situated along North Claiborne Avenue.) Adding to this, elements such as the public market can be returned to the Treme (figure 12), offering employment to the residents as well as healthy food options for the neighborhood.

The creation of a plaza honoring the Mardi Gras Indians, named for Big Chief Tutti Montana, a beloved contributor to their history, would be another addition to the emergence of this palimpsest (figure 13). Chief Tutti was known for hindering violence between warring tribes by saying that they could fight all they wanted

but they would never be as pretty as him.[31] To this day calling a Mardi Gras Indian 'pretty' is the highest compliment that you can give them. Chief Tutti passed away several years ago while defending his beloved Indians; therefore the honor would seem appropriate.

[31] Osborn, Interview with Chief Tutti Montana.

Figure 10. Conceptual Plan with Freeway.

Figure 11. Conceptual Plan with Freeway Removed.

Figure 12. Claiborne Avenue Market Montage.

Figure 13. Place de Chief Tutti Montana Montage.

Figure 14. Jazz in the Neutral Ground at Night.

Figure 15. Panoramic View of Claiborne Avenue.

VIII. Evaluations and Implications

In understanding how the Treme community has been negatively affected by planning decisions and yet fought hard to overcome them, designers can better understand what has happened in many African-American neighborhoods across the United States. The difference in the Treme is that residents have a rich culture that unites them in ways that other African-American communities lack. So how might designers respond to those issues?

As mentioned above, beautification is not the answer. Although it does address quality of life, it does not respond to the underlying injustices that have occurred. Therefore, it does not allow affected communities to gain any sort of understanding about their history and move forward. However, acknowledging and incorporating some of the difficult elements--for example, as the I-10 columns were retained in this design--might help communities come to terms with their past and move on to their future.

The aspiration for the Treme is not that it will become gentrified, or for that matter Disneyfied, but that it will become, as Wynton Marsalis has suggested for New Orleans post Katrina, a music-based economy. With the large numbers of musicians that this neighborhood still produces, there is no reason that the neighborhood that invented jazz cannot continue the tradition that was left behind when Storyville was shut down in 1917. The sort of night life that happens on Frenchmen in Faubourg Marigny can be emulated in the neighborhood where it was created.
As far as the concern for Disneyfication is concerned, currently the Treme is both a local historic district as well as a national one. The restrictions on building in such a place will hopefully thwart attempts for this kind of development. If the Louis

Although development can take on a life of its own, the hope is that these recommendations will be taken seriously, and, through this new economic development, North Claiborne Avenue can once again be something in which residents can take pride.

Armstrong Park were finally opened up to the Treme, this neighborhood could reap the benefits of the sort of tourist economy that can be seen in the Quarter and on Frenchman. The city of New Orleans has already accepted tourism as the basis for their economy, and there is no reason that the Treme should not share in this wealth.

The design proposed here does not respond to the entire street section because of the amount of blight that is the current status of the avenue. It would be premature to design out that far without understanding exactly what types of businesses would be established there. It is difficult to predict their needs. The intent is to free up the open space for the residents and, by so doing, to encourage new business opportunities for the African-American community. The street will open up and heal from the inside out, breathing new life and new opportunities for the Treme.

Opening up Louis Armstrong Park to the community is a step in the right direction. The gates to the whole park can be closed at night for the safety of all of the residents, but opening it up during the day will signify trust that currently does not exist in the community. Hopefully this will soften the attitude of residents in the neighborhood towards the park and stitch the neighborhood back together. The I-10 freeway severed these ties by splitting the neighborhood in two, and it is time to repair that damage. If these recommendations are taken seriously, the Zulu parade, and the Mardi Gras Indians could once again interact with their neutral ground as

intended, parading up and down the boulevard as families watch from the renewed open space. Removing the freeway will release the rich culture of the Treme that has been imprisoned under the I-10 Bridge.

An image of jazz in the neutral ground at night is illustrated (figure 14), and displays an average nighttime view of the space while it is activated by the neighborhood. The final illustration is a panoramic view of the Claiborne Ave. (figure 15). This image depicts a typical Sunday afternoon in the Treme. Other possibilities for the neutral ground are listed below.

Creating an art installation that marks all of the places where Louis Armstrong lived and have been torn down is a possibility for the beginning section of the neutral ground. Another opportunity is naming an area of the boulevard after Homer Plessy. The early civil rights activist lived in the Treme and his home was torn down to the build the I-10 freeway.[32] His contribution to the struggle for civil rights was one of the first in the United States for Homer Plessy enacted the court case of Plessy vs. Ferguson.

In the Treme, there is no shortage of turbulent history which could be referenced through design.

[32] Medley, 24.

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